

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-01

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 IO-04 OMB-01 ACDA-05 TRSE-00 SAJ-01 EB-04

CEA-01 DRC-01 /071 W

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R 151646Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4765

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

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AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, OGOV, UK

SUBJECT: GENERAL ELECTION OUTCOME AND IMPLICATIONS

SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH LABOR PARTY WON NARROW, THREE SEAT
MAJORITY IN NEXT PARLIAMENT, SUPPORT FROM MEMBERS OF
SMALLER PARTIES SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE
WORKING MAJORITY ON NEARLY ALL ISSUES. ELECTION RESULTS
AGAIN CONFOUNDED POLLSTERS WHO FORECAST OVERWHELMING
LABOR MAJORITY AND TRIGGERED EX POST FACTO EFFORTS TO
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RATIONALIZE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POLLS AND ACTUAL RESULT.

EMBASSY BELIEVES LABOR'S THIN MARGIN WAS FUNCTION OF THREE FACTORS: LATE SWING AWAY FROM LABOR; LOW VOTER TURN-OUT; AND WIDE VARIATIONS IN NATIONAL SWING FAVORING LABOR. DURABILITY OF LABOR'S WORKING MAJORITY, HOWEVER, IS QUESTIONABLE. BEYOND FIRST SIX MONTHS, COMMON MARKET ISSUE APPEARS TO REPRESENT SERIOUS THREAT TO STABILITY OF LABOR GOVERNMENT AND WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY PROVIDE SUPREME TEST OF PRIME MINISTER WILSON'S POLITICAL SKILL. END SUMMARY

1. LABOR PARTY WON 319 SEATS IN PARLIAMENT WHICH WILL CONVEY OCTOBER 29. CLOSENESS OF OUTCOME, GIVING LABOR BARE THREE SEAT MAJORITY OVER COMBINED OPPOSITION, AGAIN CONFIRMED OPINION POLLS WHICH HAD UNANIMOUSLY SHOWN SUBSTANTIAL LABOR LEAD OVER CONSERVATIVES. DESPITE NARROW LABOR MARGIN, PRIME MINISTER WILSON SHOULD ENJOY SUBSTANTIAL WORKING MAJORITY, AS SEVERAL MEMBERS REPRESENTING MINOR PARTIES ARE EXPECTED TO SUPPORT MOST OF LABOR PROGRAM. WELSH NATIONALIST (PLAID CYMRU) PARTY'S THREE MEMBERS ARE EXPECTED TO VOTE CONSISTENTLY WITH LABOR, EXCEPT PERHAPS ON DEVOLUTION ISSUE. SIMILARLY, NORTHERN IRELAND'S DEMOCRATIC AND LABOR PARTY (SDLP) AND NON-UNIONIST INDEPENDENT (ONE EACH) SHOULD SUPPORT LABOR'S PROGRAM, THOUGH THEY MIGHT NOT SUPPORT ALL POLICIES TOWARD ULSTER. NEITHER GROUP WOULD APPEAR TO BE IN POSITION TO OBTAIN SIGNIFICANT QUID PRO QUO FROM LABOR, EXCEPT ON ISSUE-BY-ISSUE BASIS. SUPPORT OF THESE /FIVE/ MEMBERS, HOWEVER, WILL GIVE LABOR A WORKING MAJORITY OF 13.

2. ON SOME SPECIFIC ISSUES (E.G. SOCIAL PROGRAMS), LABOR ALSO MAY BE ABLE TO COUNT ON ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM SCOTTISH NATIONALIST PARTY (SNP) WHICH SUPPORTED MUCH OF LABOR'S PROGRAM IN LAST PARLIAMENT. LIBERAL PARTY TOO MAY SUPPORT SOME LABOR PROPOSALS.

3. NORTHERN IRELAND AND DEVOLUTION (SCOTTISH AND WELSH) COULD PROVE TROUBLESOME FOR LABOR GOVERNMENT, BUT TORIES WILL PROBABLY SUPPORT GOVERNMENT ON FORMER ISSUE UNLESS IT ABANDONS PRESENT BIPARTISAN APPROACH WHICH AT THIS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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/ POINT APPEARS UNLIKELY. LIBERALS COULD ALSO PROVIDE SUPPORT ON DEVOLUTION PROPOSALS, PROVIDED THEY OFFER MEANINGFUL TRANSFER OF AUTHORITY.

4. OPINION POLLS HAVE SOUGHT TO RATIONALIZE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEIR FINAL FORECASTS (8.5 PERCENT LABOR ADVANTAGE ON WEIGHTED AVERAGE BASIS), AND ELECTION RESULTS

(2 PERCENT LABOR EDGE). SUNDAY TIMES "ANALYSIS" OF POLL DATA MADE ADJUSTMENTS FOR "CONSERVATIVE DETERMINATION AND LABOR APATHY" (3 PERCENT), POSTAL VOTE ADVANTAGE FOR TORIES (1 PERCENT) AND LATE SWING FROM LIBERAL TO CONSERVATIVE (1 PERCENT), WHICH YIELD "CORRECTED" MARGIN FOR LABOR OF 3.5 PERCENT, WELL WITHIN ACCEPTABLE MARGIN OF STATISTICAL ERROR. EMBASSY BELIEVES DIFFERENCE STEMS LARGELY FROM THREE FACTORS: LATE SWING AWAY FROM LABOR AMONG POLITICALLY UNCOMMITTED; LOW VOTER TURN OUT; AND RANDOM NATURE OF SWING AT CONSTITUENCY LEVEL.

5. POLL RESULTS AND FORECASTS OF OVERWHELMING LABOR VICTORY ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE AWAKENED FEARS OF GALLOPING SOCIALISM AMONG MANY INDEPENDENT VOTERS WHO EARLIER

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FAVORED LABOR, CAUSING THEM TO CHANGE ALLEGIANCE IN FINAL 48 HOURS. THESE SAME FEARS ALSO APPEAR TO HAVE CAUSED LIBERAL SUPPORTERS TO SWITCH TO TORIES AND RE-INFORCED CONSERVATIVES' WILL TO VOTE. LOW VOTER TURN OUT TRADITIONALLY WORKS TO BENEFIT OF CONSERVATIVES. IN THIS CASE SOME LABOR SUPPORTERS WERE NO DOUBT DISSUADED FROM VOTING BECAUSE OF OPINION POLL RESULTS, WHILE MANY LESS COMMITTED VOTERS WERE APATHETIC ABOUT SECOND ELECT-
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ION IN EIGHT MONTHS AND STAYED HOME. FINALLY, 2 PERCENT NATION-WIDE SWING TO LAB OR WAS NOT UNIFORM. THIS WAS CRUCIAL IN MARGINAL CONSTITUENCIES WHERE AVERAGE SWING TO LABOR WAS ONLY SLIGHTLY OVER 1.5 PERCENT. IN MANY SAFE LABOR SEATS SWING WAS MUCH HIGHER THAN OVERALL AVERAGE, WHILE SOME SAFE TORY SEATS PRODUCED SUBSTANTIAL SWINGS FAVORING CONSERVATIVES.

6. ASSUMING NEW LABOR GOVERNMENT DOES NOT EMBARK ON NATIONALIZATION PROGRAM FAR EXCEEDING THAT WHICH WAS ANNOUNCED BEFORE GENERAL ELECTION (I.E. DOCKS, SHIPYARDS, AEROSPACE AND DEVELOPMENT LAND), WHICH WE CONSIDER HIGHLY UNLIKELY, WILSON SHOULD BE ABLE TO COMMAND EFFECTIVE WORKING MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT FOR AT LEAST SIX TO NINE MONTHS. COMMON MARKET, HOWEVER, WILL PROVE SERIOUS THREAT TO LABOR PARTY UNITY AS RENEGOTIATIONS NEAR COMPLETION AND DATE FOR "BALLOT BOX" DECISION, WHICH LABOR HAS PROMISED WITHIN TWELVE MONTHS, APPROACHES. AT THIS POINT IT IS DIFFICULT TO FORESEE HOW WILSON WILL HANDLE THIS TEST, BUT THE CHALLENGE WILL TEST HIS VAUNTED POLITICAL SKILL TO THE UTMOST.

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